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AUTHOR Batey, Anne; Ricketts, Dick
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ABSTRACT

Intended to help educators choose the most appropriate word processing products for elementary school writing instruction, this report provides information about 12 word processor software products and 13 writing activity products. These products and the writing activities they use are as follows: (1) Bank Street Writer III (Activity Files, volumes 1 and 2); (2) Bard's "Pro-Am" Writing System; (3) FrEdWriter (FrEdWriter Lessons); (4) HomeWord Plus; (5) LogoWriter; (6) Magic Slate (I Can Write! Be a Writer! and Write with Me!); (7) MasterType's Writer; (8) MECC Writer (Ghost Writer, MECC Speller, and MECC Write Start); (9) Milliken Word Processor (Prewriting, Postwriting, and Activity Files); (10) SchoolWriter; (11) Snoopy Writer; and (12) The Writer's Assistant (Interactive Writing Tools). The report provides information about features to look for when buying word processors, explanations of the evaluation process used in choosing the listed products, tables of comparative data (including price and feature information), recommendations pertaining to each word processor, and addresses and phone numbers for each processor's manufacturer. (FL)

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WORD PROCESSORS AND WRITING ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

A MicroSIFT Quarterly Report

February 1987

by

Anne Batey
Dick Ricketts

Technology Program

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

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WHAT THIS REPORT IS ABOUT

When we set out to prepare this report we had no idea of the large number of word processing products for elementary grades. We initially identified 80 titles that in one way or another involved word processing. This list included writing software that used "built-in" word processors; talking word processors; illustrated storywriters; and professional, business, and home word processors.

Our first task was to narrow this large number of word processors for elementary students to a manageable number. Using the following criteria, we identified 12 word processors for this report:

- The product must be a stand-alone word processor not built-in as part of another writing activity.

- It must be a full-featured word processor in that it provides basic word processing functions for text entry, revision and printing. (Our list of "basics" is listed in the WHAT TO LOOK FOR section of this report.)

- The product must have some combination of supplementary materials or specific features that indicate it is designed for school use by students in grades K-6. This included such things as: variable size text, writing activities, spelling or grammar checkers, interactive tutorials on disk and prompted writing capability.

We also identified 13 products that provided writing activities using the word processors. Table 1 on the next page shows the resulting list of products.

Next we reviewed each and wrote complete product descriptions which are summarized in Table 2 (page 6). We also highlighted six word processors we recommend for preview (pages 7 and 8). The complete product descriptions can be found in a companion report called Product Descriptions: Word Processors and Writing Activities for the Elementary Grades.

TABLE 1: WORD PROCESSING AND WRITING ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY GRADES

Title	Price	Type	Level	Hardware	Copyright	Producer
Bank Street Writer III	79.95	word processor	K-12	AP IB	1986	Scholastic
Activity Files: Vol. 1	59.95	writing activities	6-8	AP IB CO AT	1984	Scholastic
Activity Files: Vol. 2	89.95	writing activities	4-6	AP IB CO AT	1984	Scholastic
Bard's "Pro-AM"	69.95	word processor	3-12	AP	1985	Writ Soft Intl
FrEdWriter	40.00	word processor	3-12	AP	1985	Steele Publ
FrEdWriter Lessons	40.00	writing activities	3-12	AP	1986	Steele Publ
HomeWord Plus	69.95	word processor	3-12	AP	1985	Sierra-On Line
LogoWriter	450.00	word processor	3-8	AP IB	1986	Logo Comp Sys
Magic Slate	99.95	word processor	2-12	AP	1985	Sunburst
I Can Write!	40.00	writing activities	2	AP	1986	Sunburst
Be a Writer!	40.00	writing activities	3	AP	1986	Sunburst
Write With Me!	59.00	writing activities	4	AP	1986	Sunburst
MasterType's Writer	90.00	word processor	1-12	AP CO	1986	D.C.Heath
MECC Writer	49.00	word processor	6-12	AP	1985	MECC
Ghost Writer	89.00	revising	6-12	AP	1986	MECC
MECC Speller	39.00	spelling check	6-10	AP	1985	MECC
MECC Write Start	39.00	writing activities	6-10	AP	1985	MECC
Milliken Word Processor	69.95	word processor	1-12	AP IB	1984	Milliken
Prewriting	195.00	writing activities	3-10	AP IB	1985	Milliken
Postwriting	225.00	revising	3-10	AP IB	1985	Milliken
Activity Files	100.00	writing activities	3-10	AP IB	1986	Milliken
SchoolWriter	79.95	word processor	4-8	AP	1985	SRA
Snoopy Writer	39.95	word processor	1-6	AP CO	1985	Random House
The Writer's Assistant	59.95	word processor	4-12	AP	1984	Brittanica
Interactive Writing Tools	279.00	writing activities	3-9	AP	1986	Britannica

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN COMPARING WORD PROCESSORS

Basic Features. The word processors featured in this report provide the following basic features.

Text Entry and Edit Features

Cursor Movement--Can you move the cursor up, down, left and right by character?

Entry Modes--Can you both Insert text and Typeover existing text?

Delete--Can you delete with a special key or keys? (Instead of typeover only)

Block operations--Can you mark a block of text and then move, copy, or delete it?

Find--Can you search a document for a word or phrase? Once a word is found, many word processors will automatically replace it with a designated word.

File Handling

Save--Can you save your file on disk?

Load--Can you load a file saved on disk?

Printing

Margins and Line Spacing--When printing can you control margins and line spacing?

Page Numbers--Can you print page numbers on a document?

Centering--Can you center lines of text such as titles?

Support Materials

User Manual--Is there a user manual for basic word processor operation?

Quick Reference--Is there a summary card or sheet of commands for quick reference?

Additional Features. The following are additional convenient features that the word processors in this report may have. We reported on these features in Table 2. Letters in parentheses indicate the codes used in the table.

Misc. Features

Operation--Do you make selections from menus only (M)? Commands only (C)? Or Both (B)? Menus make a word processor easy to learn but they tend to be slow and cumbersome once you know the ropes. Having both menu and command driven operation is best.

Mouse--Can you use a mouse for making selections?

Icons--Does the program use graphic symbols to represent selections in a menu? Often icons and mouse support are provided together.

Column choice--What are the choices for number of columns per line? Type sizes are determined by the number of columns the screen or page is divided into: 20, 40, or 80; the smaller the column division the larger the type.

Typestyles--Is there a selection of typestyles and do they print to screen (S), only to printer (P), or both (B)? When a selected typestyle such as italics or underline appears on the screen young students are reassured that "what they see is what they will get" when the document is printed.

Frozen Prompts--Is it possible to enter "frozen" text to create prompted writing files for students? Usually, the prompts cannot be written over (thus, "frozen") and the prompts are not included when the final document is printed.

Merge Files--Can you attach an existing file to one you are working on?

"Text only" Files--Is there an option to save a file as text only or in ASCII code? This option is useful for telecommunicating a file. For example, text files can be transported to other word processors or to spelling and grammar checkers.

Macros--Is it possible to designate special keys to do the work of several keystrokes?

Support Features

Help Screens--Are help screens readily available to remind you of commands and their functions?

Tutorial--Is there an interactive, on-screen tutorial which teaches the basic operations of the word processor?

Teacher's Guide--Is there a special section for teachers in the documentation?

Student Activities--Do the support materials include activities for students? This might be lesson outlines, reproducible handouts or files on disk. The activities might focus on writing or word processing.

Writing Aids

Spelling Checker--Does the word processor include a spelling checker? If so, does it allow you to correct spelling as it checks? (Y+)

Grammar Checker--Does it include a grammar checker? If so, does it allow you to change wording as it checks? (Y+)

Thesaurus--Does it include a thesaurus? If so, can you insert alternative words as it identifies them? (Y+)

HOW WE RATED THE WORD PROCESSORS

In Table 2 we rated the word processors with a five-point scale: 5-outstanding, 4-good, 3-average, 2-poor, and 1-unacceptable and included five different categories:

Features--indicates the quantity and quality of both the basic and additional features. The rating also reflects how well the features perform.

Support Features--indicates the quantity and quality of the support. This includes documentation, interactive tutorials, help screens, and student activities.

Ease of Learning--reflects the initial period of getting familiar with the features of the word processor.

Ease of Use--reflects the logic and efficiency of the word processor operations, especially after the initial learning period.

Value--indicates the value of the word processor when considering its price.

Overall Score--is not a strict average of scores from the above; it reflects a general score when all factors are taken into account.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF WORD PROCESSORS FOR ELEMENTARY GRADES

		Miscellaneous Features										Support Features				Writing Tools			Ratings					
	Price	Operation	Mouse	Icons	Column Choice			Typestyles	Frozen Prompts	Merge files	"Text only" files	Macros	Help Screens	Tutorial	Teacher's Guide	Student Activities	Spelling Checker	Grammar Checker	Thesaurus	Features	Support Features	Ease of Learning	Ease of Use	Value	Overall Score
Bank Street Writer III	79.95	M	Y	N	20	40	80	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+	Y	Y+	5	5	5	4	5	5
Bard's "Pro-AM"	69.95	B	N	N		40	80	P	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y+	N	Y+	4	4	5	4	5	4
FrEdWriter	40.00	C	N	N		40	80	P	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	4	5	4	5	5	5
HomeWord Plus	69.95	B	Y	Y		40	80	P	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	4	3	3	3	3	3
LogoWriter	450.00	C	N	N		40		N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	4	5	4	4	5	5
Magic Slate	99.95	M	N	Y	20	40	80	B	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	4	5	5	5	4	5
MasterType's Writer	90.00	B	N	N	20	40	70	B	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	4	4	5	4	4	4
MECC Writer	49.00	C	N	N			80	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N*	N*	N	2	4	5	4	3	3
Milliken Word Processor	69.95	M	N	N		40	80	P	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N*	N*	N	3	4	5	3	3	3
Snoopy Writer	39.95	M	N	N		40		N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	2	2	5	5	2	2
The Writer's Assistant	59.95	M	N	N			80	P	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	3	3	2	2	2	2

KEY: Y - YES N - NO M - MENU DRIVEN C - COMMAND DRIVEN B - BOTH P - PRINTER S - SCREEN B - BOTH

RATINGS INDEX: 5 - OUTSTANDING 4 - GOOD 3 - SATISFACTORY 2 - POOR 1 - UNACCEPTABLE

NOTE: SchoolWriter was not included in this comparison. A preview copy was unavailable.

*MECC Writer and Milliken Word Processor have spelling and grammar checkers available separately.

OUR PREVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS (in alphabetical order)

Bank Street Writer III

Only Magic Slate can compete with this premier word processing system for schools. While the basic operation and appearance remain the same as the previous Bank Street Writers, students and teachers will soon discover the added power that makes Bank Street Writer III a "must" for preview. The prompted writing capability, time-saving function keys (macros), a top-notch spelling corrector and helpful thesaurus are especially worth attention. All this is reasonably priced and retains the easy-to-use format needed by many students. Finally, Scholastic provides proven writing activities to support the writing process while using Bank Street Writer III.

The Bard's "Pro-Am" Word Processing System

"Clear" and "accommodating" describe The Bard's System by Writing Software International. This word processor is easy to use from the first screen on--even after summer vacation. In this three-level system, the Starter and Experienced levels have an appropriately restricted set of commands. For example, the Starter uses 40-column format and does not have block operations. Once famimilar with the system, students will want to push on to the beckoning Professional level with its full range of features like a more efficient command driven operation, 80-column format, macros, large variety of printer options, etc. Every student will want to use the spelling corrector, which is one of the best reviewed.

FrEdWriter

What FrEdWriter lacks in polish, it makes up for in value. Its status as freeware means each of your students can own a word processor. Respect for FrEdWriter grows as students discover its capabilities; it provides most anything students (and teachers) need in a word processor. Particulary praiseworthy are its on-call help screens, choice of 40- or 80-column display, prompted writing, printing commands and availability of a Spanish-language version. Now that FrEdWriter comes with eight remarkably thorough writing lessons, FrEdWriter is formidable competition for the commercial word processing systems designed for school use.

LogoWriter

LogoWriter is a vehicle for problem-solving with Logo programming and word processing. It combines the power and atmosphere of Logo with the added expressiveness of word processing. The activity books and cards, and teacher's guide suggest ways to use this tool throughout the elementary curriculum. The package should revive interest among teachers who were frustrated in their attempts to integrate Logo into the curriculum. Logo Computer Systems has shown a sensitivity to school

finances and the need for home-school cooperation through its site licensing policy. A single purchase buys the rights to make enough copies for your district. Although LogoWriter has limited word processing capabilities, the package must be considered when previewing word processing systems for elementary schools.

Magic Slate

Magic Slate deserves all the status and respect of a true classic. It was the first word processor billed as a "word processor that grows with you." And it does. Its 20- and 40-column versions are comfortable and friendly to the novice and the 80-column version has capabilities that can satisfy secondary students. It is unusual in that any selected typestyle appears on the screen, reassuring students with its What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get screen display. As an additional attraction, Sunburst has produced three absorbing writing units for grades 2-4 (I Can Write!, Be a Writer! and Write With Me!). If schools are willing to purchase a spelling corrector separately, Magic Slate is a strong candidate for a district-wide word processing system.

MasterType's Writer

MasterType's Writer may be the most unusual word processing system available for elementary schools. It certainly is the most fun! The use of color highlighting, the ability to design new letters and symbols, and the list sorting capability open up attractive possibilities for the classroom. The color enhances on-screen reading and makes prompted writing possible. Students who like calligraphy or cryptography will go wild as they design up to 96 new characters. The sorting capability sorts lists of words or phrases in alphbetical or numerical order. This D.C. Heath program should be previewed for its refreshing and novel approach.

PRODUCER INFORMATION

D.C.Heath Software
125 Spring Street
Lexington, MA 02173
800/225-1149

Encyclopaedia Britannica
425 North Michigan Avenue
10th Floor
Chicago, IL 60611
800/621-3900

Logo Computer Systems
555 West 57th Street
Suite 1236
New York, NY 10019
800/34LOGIC

Minnesota Educational Computing
Corporation (MECC)
3490 Lexington Avenue North
St. Paul, MN 55126
612/481-3500

Milliken Publishing
1100 Research Blvd.
PO Box 21579
St. Louis, MO 63132
314/991-4220

Random House
201 East 50th Street
New York, NY 10022
212/572-2616

Scholastic Inc.
2931 East McCarty Street
P.O. Box 5702
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Sierra On-Line
Sierra On-Line Building
Coarsegold, CA 93614
209/683-6858

SRA/SCI Research Associates
155 North Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606
800/621-0476

Steele Publishing
P.O. Box 5493
Concord, CA 94524
415/685-7265

Sunburst Communications
39 Washington Avenue
Pleasantville, NY 10570-9971
800/431-1934

Writing Software International
110 East Broadway
Suite 600
Missoula, MT 59802
406/543-3141